1878

A

SERMON

OCCASIONED BY

A LATE DESPERATE ATTEMPT

ON

THE LIFE

OF

HIS MAJESTY.

PREACHED AT CHRIST'S CHURCH, IN BATH,
ON SUNDAY, JUNE 8, 1800,

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1 PETER ii. 17.

FEAR GOD; HONOUR THE KING.

THE condition of man ſince the Fall, conſidered as a being naturally prone to evil and averſe from good, evinces the neceſſity of firmly eſtabliſhing that religious principle, which conſtitutes the only effectual ſecurity for the diſcharge of all moral and ſocial obligation. Syſtems, however admirable in other reſpects, that are drawn up independent of this grand principle of moral action, muſt prove inadequate to their purpoſe. By ſuppoſing perfections which do not exiſt; and by drawing a picture of human nature, in all the correctneſs of ſymmetry and proportion, from an Original, wearing the ſtrong marks of hereditary deformity; the authors of them, whether of ancient or modern date, have flattered the pride of man at the expenſe of truth.

Knowledge on this ſubject is to be derived only from that fountain of all truth, the revealed Word of God. From that ſacred word, we are informed, that God created man in his own image;—a perfect being. From the ſame authority we learn, that man ſoon fell from this primæval ſtate of perfection; and introduced ſin and corruption into the world, as the conſequences of his fall. "And it repented the Lord "that he had made man upon the earth; "for God ſaw that the wickedneſs of man "was great in the earth; and that every ima- "gination of the thoughts of his heart was "only evil continually."—The foregoing words furniſh a ſhort but ſtriking deſcription of the condition of man, ſubſequent to the fall; in which, inſtead of the perfect ſelf-ſufficient creature of the fancy, we are conſtrained to behold a poor, corrupt, degenerated being.

Having viewed this picture with the attention to which it is entitled, we ſhall be prepared to regard that ſpecious theory, (relative to the dignity of human nature

and the ſufficiency of human reaſon, conſidered as a moral directory for the world) as a mere fiction of the human brain; a pleaſing fancy, rather than a reality;—whereby ſpeculating men have dreſſed up and given form to thoſe ideal ſyſtems, which have, from time to time, been preſented to the world;—a theory not more inconſiſtent with the actual ſtate of man, than it is contradictory to an eſtabliſhed and fundamental doctrine of the Bible.

On this uncertain ground, however, of inconſiſtent theory and inconcluſive ſpeculation, was raiſed the imperfect, the baſeleſs, the tottering fabric of heathen morality. And, when the bulk of mankind had no better ſtandard of judgment to appeal to for the determination of their rule of life, the immoral conduct of the world, under ſuch circumſtances, becomes leſs an object for ſurprize than for pity. Unaſſiſted reaſon could not, if we may ſo ſay, raiſe itſelf above a human level: The ſyſtems that it formed muſt, therefore, not only partake of the fallibility of their

author, but muſt, neceſſarily, be ſubject to the control of that power, from whence they derived their exiſtence.

But human government to reſt ſecure, muſt be raiſed on ſome ſettled foundation. It muſt be built on a principle which, being ſuperior to human reaſon, may thereby prove competent to the direction and control of human actions. Legiſlators, therefore, however they have differed from each other in their reſpective plans of policy, have generally agreed in this fundamental point—that, to enable man with effect to govern man, ſome higher power muſt be called in to his aſſiſtance. What the heathen legiſlator, then, in conſequence of the unenlightened ſtate in which he lived, with the view of giving effect to his imperfect ſcheme of civil policy, was obliged to imagine—the Chriſtian governor appeals to, as a truth eſtabliſhed by that perfect revelation which the Goſpel has laid before him.

The Politics of the Bible are plain and

ſimple. They are contained in the ſubſtance of the text—" Fear God; honour " the King" which points out, in a few words, both the origin and nature of all government. From this, in connexion with other paſſages in Scripture, we learn, that government is the ordinance of God: and experience tells us, that the only ſecurity for the effects of government on the human mind, is the *fear of God.* Power, independent of the control of authority, is but the force of the ſtrongeſt arm; in the exerciſe of which the natural man differs in ſhape only from the wild tenants of the of the foreſt. So far as this power of force is concerned, the multitude muſt always have the advantage over the magiſtrate, armed only with the power of authority; upon the ſame principle that a gang of robbers have the advantage over the defenceleſs traveller. But this power, we are to obſerve, is abſolutely inconſiſtent with a ſtate of ſociety, which is eſtabliſhed on the ſettlement of rightful poſſeſſion, and the due ſecurity of human intercourſe.

Now,

Now, it is as impoſſible for man to be a wild and a civilized being at the ſame time, as it is, that a ſtate of nature and a ſtate of ſociety ſhould exiſt together; for the one is the neceſſary deſtruction of the other. As a member of ſociety, man virtually gives up the law of force, by which the natural man governs himſelf; for that law of reaſon, by which the ſocial man is governed in common with his fellow-citizens; and this law of reaſon, to become effectual in its operation, muſt ultimately terminate in the word of God. For civilized man, in conſequence of the corruption by the fall, is ſo frequently diſpoſed to fall back into his wild ſtate of nature; by becoming the judge in his own cauſe, the arbiter of his own differences, and the determiner of his own rights; that nothing can reſtrain him from inflicting evil on his fellow-creatures, but the apprehenſion of thereby drawing down ſome greater evil on himſelf. But the law of reaſon, as it has been drawn out by man, is not of itſelf adequate to this purpoſe. For this law may be rendered ineffectual many ways. The lawleſs diſturber of ſo-

ciety may remain undiſcovered; or, ſhould he be diſcovered—through the fallibility of a human tribunal, he may ſtill eſcape unpuniſhed. The poſſibility of either of theſe events holds out to man, circumſtanced as he is, ſuch an encouragement to ſin and diſorder, as is abolutely incompatible with the welfare of ſociety.

The remedy then, in this, as in all other caſes, muſt be ſuited to the nature of the diſeaſe, otherwiſe no effectual cure is to be expected. "Conſidering, therefore," as a judicious writer has obſerved, "the depraved ſtate of mankind, their fraud to overreach, their boldneſs to overbear thoſe laws, to which, as members of ſociety, they ſhould be ſubject; it behoveth that the world be held in awe, not by a vain ſurmiſe, but by a true apprehenſion of ſomewhat which no man can think himſelf able to withſtand." *Hooker.*

Taken in this light, *the fear of God* may be conſidered as conſtituting not only the beginning, but the *conſummation* of all

human wiſdom. For it is that powerful motive which, by giving ſtability and effect to the ſyſtems of the human legiſlator, can alone ſecure the peace and good order of ſociety. It is that motive which can alone reſtrain men from the commiſſion of ſin, and make them active and vigilant to fulfil the duties of their ſeveral ſtations; "not with eye-ſervice, as men-pleaſers— "but with ſingleneſs of heart, as fearing "God; that Being to whom vengeance be- "longeth, and who will render unto every "man according to his deeds."

Upon the ground then, of this acknowledged truth, that there can be no effectual ſecurity againſt the unruly will of man, but where religion conſtitutes the eſtabliſhed baſis of government, and the fear of God the ruling principle of action,—all Chriſtian legiſlators have proceeded; under the conviction, that "except the Lord build "the houſe, their labour is but vain that "build it."

When we conſider, that the principal fa-

culty, by which man is diſtinguiſhed from the brute animal, is *reaſon*; we ſhall readily conclude, that he was deſigned for ſociety, and to become a ſubject for rational government; conſequently, we ſhall not be ſurpriſed to find the Scripture bearing at leaſt indirect teſtimony to the fact, by informing us, that "there is no power but of God; "and that the powers that be are ordained "of God." By which we are given to underſtand, that all power originates with God, and deſcends from God to man.— "Thou couldſt have no power at all againſt "me," ſaid Jeſus to Pontius Pilate, when about to pronounce his unjuſt ſentence, "except it were given thee *from above*."

There is a power, indeed, which man poſſeſſes in common with the beaſts that periſh—that power of force which is the conſequence of ſuperior ſtrength; but this is no ſubject for argument: ſuch power belongs to a ſtate of nature; and, ſpeaking as Chriſtians, to a ſtate of nature it ought to be confined. But the power of which we are ſpeaking, and which is the only power

worth conſideration, is that delegated power of *authority*, by which man aſſumes the right to control, direct, and puniſh the actions of his fellow men. This power could not originate with man, for obvious reaſons; but muſt be derived from a ſuperior ſource; even from that Being, who, having firſt made man for ſociety, afterwards made ſociety for man. Government, conſequently, muſt originally proceed from God; becauſe without government no ſociety could ſubſiſt.

Such is the information we receive from Scripture on this ſubject. As a conſequence of which information, we are required to ſubmit to government, as the ordinance of God, "for the Lord's ſake." "For he," ſays the apoſtle, ſpeaking of a governor, "is the miniſter of God to thee "for good;" as the miniſter of God, he is alſo "a revenger, to execute wrath upon "him that doeth evil." *Rom.* xiii. 4. The power, therefore, which he exerciſes, is the power of God, committed to his truſt for the benefit of ſociety; and the autho-

rity by which he exerciſes it, is an authority derived from the ſupreme Governor of the world, to whom all rule and authority originally belong. " Wherefore," continues the ſame Apoſtle (or for this reaſon), " ye muſt needs be ſubject, not only for " wrath, but alſo for conſcience ſake." Conſidering the nature of government, and the object of it—that it is the ordinance of God; that it is inſtituted for the welfare of man; and that it is adminiſtered by an authority delegated from on high—man muſt be ſubject to it; not only through fear of puniſhment, for that is a ſlaviſh idea; but from that better principle of conſcience, which conſtrains him, as a reaſonable creature, to obey his appointed governor, becauſe he is armed with the authority of that Being who has a right to command.

From theſe premiſes, it will be eaſy to deduce both the ſin and the folly of all reſiſtance to lawful authority. The ſin of reſiſtance conſiſts in this;—that it is an oppoſition to the plan of Divine Wiſdom, for the government of his rational creatures;

and without which they, in a great degree, ceaſe to be rational. For its effect is to degrade and brutaliſe that diſtinguiſhed creature, which the Creator deſigned, by a due courſe of diſcipline, to ſpiritualiſe, and elevate to a ſtate of communion with himſelf.

The firſt rebel againſt eſtabliſhed order, was the devil, in heaven: And his expulſion from the preſence of God, was the conſequence of his ſin. All rebellion in earth contains in it a ſtrong ſpice of the devil's original ſin. It is the offspring of that ſpirit of independence, and that diſinclination to order and obedience, which are the diſtinguiſhing properties of the natural man. As a principal object, then, of the religion of Chriſt, was to bring this natural man under ſubjection; we cannot be ſurpriſed that the ſentence denounced againſt a ſin ſo peculiarly characteriſtic of him, ſhould be of the ſtrongeſt kind.—"Whoſoever reſiſteth the power," ſays the Apoſtle, "reſiſteth the ordinance of God; and "they that reſiſt ſhall receive to themſelves "damnation." *Rom.* xiii. 2.

The folly of reſiſtance to lawful authority will evidently appear, if we conſider, that ſociety was inſtituted for the benefit of its members. It becomes, conſequently, the intereſt of thoſe members, that ſociety ſhould be ſupported. Upon this principle the exhortation of the Apoſtle is founded. "I exhort," ſays he, "that ſupplications, "prayers, interceſſions, and giving of "thanks, be made for kings, and for all "that are in authority." And the reaſon is immediately ſubjoined—"That we (the "ſubjects of that authority) may lead a "quiet and peaceable life, in all godlineſs "and honeſty." To lead a quiet and peaceable life, in all godlineſs and honeſty, may ſurely be conſidered as the conſummation of human happineſs. But this happineſs is not to be attained in a ſtate of confuſion and diſorder; when, in conſequence of human paſſions and appetites being uncontrolled, the weak become a prey to the ſtrong—the ſimple and unſuſpecting, to the artful and deſigning,—without remedy or redreſs; but in that ſtate of regulated ſociety, in which alone man has ſecurity for

his property, his character, and his perſon; in which alone he can ſay—This is my own; the poſſeſſion of it is ſecured to me by the laws of my country; and, therefore, I may ſit down under my own vine and enjoy it.

Now, no wiſe man acts againſt his own intereſt: It may, indeed, be the higheſt proof of his wiſdom, under ſome circumſtances, to ſacrifice a preſent advantage to a future one; or to bear a preſent evil, for the ſake of a futuregood:—But to forego the preſent advantages of ſociety, without a proſpect of any reverſionary good—to be miſerable here, only to become more miſerable hereafter—is a conduct that, ſo far from having any portion of wiſdom in it, challenges to itſelf, the title of the moſt conſummate folly. For, when it is conſidered that the advantages of ſociety are ſanctioned by divine authority, it follows, from thence, that whoſoever is fool enough to deprive himſelf of the former, by his reſiſtance of the latter, does, with the promiſe of the life that now is, give up, at the ſame time, the promiſe of that which is to

come; "treaſuring up to himſelf, wrath, "againſt the day of wrath and fiery in- "dignation."

Thus has the All-wiſe Creator and ſupreme Governor of the World, bound together the intereſt and duty of his rational creatures, by that ſtrong chain of indiſpenſible obligation, which none but fools or madmen will ever attempt to burſt aſunder.

This, it will be admitted, is not popular doctrine. For the generality of mankind are, alas! too little acquainted with the ſpirit of Chriſtianity, to reliſh any doctrine that lays reſtraint on the natural man. But, popular or unpopular, if the doctrine be founded on truth, it muſt be preached. The wiſdom of God, though by ſome men it may be called fooliſhneſs, muſt, at all events, be maintained by the miniſters of God. And if the public mind has been led wrong on this important ſubject, it muſt be ſet right again; by reverting to that principle, by which alone the order and

happineſs of ſociety can be effectually ſecured. For theſe are times which render the honeſt exertion of every profeſſional duty indiſpenſable. And our duty it is, as miniſters of Chriſt, to preach the ſelf-denying, ſaving doctrines of the croſs—*humility*, *obedience*, and *reſignation*; in oppoſition to thoſe natural but deſtructive doctrines of *pride*, *ſelf-ſufficiency*, and *independence*.

We have been told, and from what will be thought high authority* in the world, that upon the ſubject of obedience to government, ſo far as relates to the extent of it, the Goſpel has left man preciſely in the ſame condition in which it found him: That it has provided for no extreme caſes; but laid down only the general principle of obedience to government; leaving it to the diſcretion and diſpoſition of the parties to whom the principle is directed, to determine in what caſes, and under what circumſtances, it is to be applied. This, if I miſtake not, is not ſo much to interpret Scripture, as to explain it away. And

* Dr. Paley.

certain it is, that ſuch a poſition, which includes in it a right of reſiſtance in certain caſes, is not more contradictory to the letter and true ſpirit of the religion we profeſs, than it is to the poſitive laws of the country in which we live.

But the falſehood of this poſition is not more evident than is its abſurdity. The law of obedience to government was made for the purpoſe of ſecuring ſociety againſt that power of force, which knows no diſtinction between right and wrong. But, if the application of this law is to depend on the judgment of the party intended to be bound by it, the deſign of its promulgation muſt, in a great degree, be fruſtrated. For the right of reſiſtance to authority being, in ſuch caſe, left to be determined by the reſiſting party, all cauſes of that kind are, of courſe, tried by a *rebel jury*; and, conſequently, every criminal is ſure to meet with an honourable acquittal. Upon ſuch uncertain ground no ſociety could ſubſiſt.

Every law, enacted by proper authority, to be effective, muſt be deciſive and binding on the parties for whom it is made. To admit, then, that there is a right of reſiſtance to authority, when that reſiſtance is conducive to public happineſs; or, in other words, to ſay, that obedience to authority is enjoined, "ſo long as it appears "to be neceſſary, or conducive to the com-"mon welfare,"* is not only to invite turbulent men to hazard a moſt dangerous experiment, the effect of which it is not in their power to aſcertain; but it is, moreover, to invert the order of ſociety, by giving to the governed that power of control over the governors, which is abſolutely inconſiſtent with all regular government. The Conſtitution of this country knows of no right of control over the power of authority, but a *legal* one: conſequently, whilſt any control is otherwiſe than *legally* adminiſtered, our boaſted Conſtitution, ſo far as it applies to that caſe, ceaſes to exiſt. Inſtead, therefore, of weighing as it were, extreme caſes in the ſcale of public opinion, with a view of deter-

* Dr. Paley.

mining, when this ſuppoſed right of reſiſtance is to be ſet up, (a ſubject on which there will always be great difference of opinion;) the wiſeſt and moſt ſcriptural mode of proceeding will be, to reject, at once a poſition, which militates not leſs againſt the principle on which government is eſtabliſhed, than it does againſt the common-ſenſe of mankind.

No man of common underſtanding, provided he ſuffers himſelf to be governed by it, ſubjects himſelf to a greater evil, for the ſake of getting rid of a leſſer one. But the partial evil derived to ſociety from the occaſional abuſe of authority, is not to be weighed againſt that extremity of evil, which is the never-failing conſequence of the want of it. The power of authority, though liable to abuſe, muſt ſtill, as tending to reſtrain the unruly will of man, always conduce to ſome good: whereas, the power of the people, which is the power of force, the uniform effect of which is to pull down and to deſtroy, muſt, conſequently, always conduce to evil. The Scripture,

which gives to every thing its proper name; —which no where ſpeaks of the power of the people as the origin of government; but compares the madneſs of the people to the boiſterous waves of a troubled ſea, bearing down all before them—has, therefore, placed this ſubject on the only ground on which it can ſtand ſecure. Inſtead of intimating then, that the Scripture has provided for no extreme caſes; with the view of leaving civilized man at liberty to return to his wild ſtate of nature, when, in his own judgment, the extremity of the caſe appears to warrant him in ſo doing; it ſhould be ſaid, that it has wiſely provided for the *moſt extreme of all caſes*, namely, *the total want of government*; by making the rule of obedience to lawful authority, not *diſcretional*, but *abſolute*; upon the idea, that the natural man is better in any hands than in his own; and, conſequently, that even a bad government is better for him than no government at all. Upon this principle, the early preachers of the Goſpel placed obedience to eſtabliſhed authority among the firſt articles of ſocial duty; and

their diſciples were, in conſequence, directed to pray even for heathen emperors, and perſecutors of the Chriſtian faith. By the ſame principle, the conduct of God's choſen people was directed during their captivity in Babylon:—"Thus ſaith the "Lord of Hoſts, the God of Iſrael, unto all "that are carried away captives, whom I "have cauſed to be carried away from Je- "ruſalem unto Babylon;—ſeek the peace "of the city whither I have cauſed you to "be carried away captives, and pray unto "the Lord for it; for, in the peace thereof "ye ſhall have peace." *Jer.* xxix. 4, 7.

From ſuch examples as theſe, though not ſtrictly applicable to our condition, the Chriſtian may, nevertheleſs, learn his duty;—a duty which carries with it its own reward; and upon which, ſo long as the Bible maintains its authority there can be but one opinion:—For, "where envying and "ſtrife is, there is confuſion, and every evil "work."—"This wiſdom deſcendeth not "from above; but is earthly, ſenſual, deviliſh. "But the wiſdom that is from above, that

which is derived from the fountain of all wiſdom, and calculated to make man wiſe unto ſalvation, " is firſt, pure, then " peaceable; full of mercy and good fruits. " And the fruit of ſuch wiſdom is ſown in " peace of them that make peace." In the beautiful language of the prophet—" when " the Spirit be poured upon us from on " high, then judgment ſhall dwell in the " wilderneſs, and righteouſneſs remain in " in the fruitful field. And the work of " righteouſneſs ſhall be peace; and the effect " of righteouſneſs, quietneſs and aſſurance " for ever." *Iſa.* xxxii. 15,

This conſideration accounts for the mad plan that has been ſet on foot by the philoſophers of the preſent day, for removing out of the way the only effectual impediment to the progreſs of their *revolutionary* ſyſtem. So long as the religious principle, founded upon the knowledge and fear of God, maintains its influence on the human mind, the order of ſociety has ſomething to look to for its ſupport. But the never-failing conſequence of the excluſion of the

Deity from the world, will be the extinction of all moral and ſocial obligation. In ſuch caſe, the grand cement of ſociety being diſſolved, man returns to his ſtate of nature; which, knowing no law but that in the members—the law of appetite and paſſion—muſt, of courſe, be a ſtate of ſavage ferocity and brutal ſenſuality.

We are not, therefore, to be ſurpriſed at the effect which this mad plan has produced on the character of a neighbouring nation; which, from being, as a civilized ſtate, one of the diſtinguiſhing ornaments, has become the plague, the ſcourge, and the diſgrace—of Europe.—It will be our wiſdom, my brethren, to profit by their folly.

Prepared by the leſſons of infidel philoſophers, they pulled down the altar, with a view to the throwing down the throne that was built upon it. Thus did infidelity and revolution go hand in hand together: and the diſorganization of their political

ſtate, and the conſequent miſery of its members, has been the complete reſult of the atheiſtic experiment.

The Chriſtian Religion in this country ſtands, we truſt, on too ſettled a foundation to be ſo readily ſhaken. At the ſame time it behoves us to be on our guard; to join the wiſdom of the ſerpent to the harmleſsneſs of the dove; ſince the ſame means, which have proved ſo ſucceſsful againſt it, are here alſo induſtriouſly employed to ſap and undermine it. Publications of an infidel and immoral tendency are finding their way into every department of ſociety, from the circles of diſſipated faſhion, down to the dwelling of the humble cottager; diſguiſed under dreſſes beſt calculated to impoſe on the party, for whoſe uſe they are particularly deſigned.

It is almoſt needleſs to inform you, that the uniform object of all theſe baneful publications is, to ſet men free from that reli- religious reſtraint, which conſtitutes the only ſecurity for moral government. By

flattering the pride and miniſtering to the corruption of the natural man, the authors of theſe publications have it in view, to prepare him for the part they deſign him to act on that licentious theatre; which is to be ſupported at the expenſe of every thing that is good, great, and honorable in ſociety.

Thanks be to God! the effects of theſe publications in this country have been but partial. They have manifeſted themſelves chiefly in ſeditious aſſemblies and private cabals; which, though the beginning of evils, have, through the interpoſition of a gracious Providence, been hitherto prevented from proceeding to any fatal extreme. When it is conſidered, however, that to ſuch a poiſonous ſource may probably be traced up a late infamous attempt on the life of the beſt of Kings;—when it is moreover conſidered, what might have been the conſequence, had the attempt proved ſucceſsful; with the view of bearing the ſtrongeſt teſtimony againſt ſuch an unprincipled, irreligious, diabolical pro-

ceeding; you will do more than barely abſent yourſelves from ſuch illegal meetings; —as good ſubjects, you will hold them in utter deteſtation, and on all occaſions do your utmoſt to prevent them.

But, my brethren, when I conſider that I am addreſſing myſelf to members of the Chriſtian Church,—argument, on ſuch a ſubject, appears to be almoſt unneceſſary. You have that beſt of books, the Bible, in your hand: Make but the proper uſe of it, and you will have nothing to fear, either from the ſophiſtical arguments of the infidel, or the licentious doctrines of thoſe, who, while they promiſe liberty and refinement, are themſelves the ſervants of ſenſuality and corruption. As Chriſtians, your conſolations in this life, and your expectations in that which is to come, are grounded on the revealed word of God. That ſacred word informs you, that government is the ordinance of God; and that reſiſtance to lawful authority is a ſin of the firſt magnitude. From that ſacred book you learn, that religion is man's greateſt good; the abſence of

it, conſequently, his greateſt evil. From whence the obvious concluſion is, that, as the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wiſdom; every attempt to caſt away that ſalutary fear, muſt be the extremity of human folly. Having, then, my brethren, well weighed this important ſubject in your minds; having conſidered the nature and end of government; the authority by which it is eſtabliſhed; and the intereſt and duty by which all ſubjects are bound to ſupport it; if you are Chriſtians, you will readily and thankfully adopt the language of the prieſt and the prophet, and ſay, "God ſave the King." "And let all the people ſay, Amen."

Now, to the King of Kings, Lord of Lords, and only ruler of Princes; to Him by whom kings reign, and to whom kings muſt be accountable for the diſcharge of their important truſt; to that all-wiſe, all-gracious, and all-powerful Being, "who "ſtilleth the raging of the ſea, the noiſe of "his waves, and the madneſs of the people" be aſcribed by all perſons, and in all places, bleſſing, and honour, and glory, and power, now and for ever!"

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